

Nick Valeriano in support of SR-254

Pennsylvania State Senate committee on State Government

October 17, 2018

Thank you chairman Folmer, vice-chairman Killion, and members of the committee for hearing us all today. My name is Nick Valeriano. I've been a resident of Montgomery County, PA for over 29 years. Back in 2012, I was frustrated by a presidential election where I believed Obama and Romney were both heavily influenced by special interests. It was then I first heard about and got involved with the all-volunteer PA United to Amend group. I've since donated my money and volunteered my time as a volunteer organizer joining my fellow Pennsylvania citizens who believe in the Free and Fair Elections Resolution.

I immediately identified with the nonpartisan stance of PAUA and the fact that we are using the Article 5 Convention process to go around Congress. Congress' approval rating has been declining heavily since Sept 11th. You can point to any number of specific laws and policies as the reason for this, but the underlying issue behind their gridlock has been the massive influence of money in politics. The public no longer believes Congress is able to police themselves and so it is up to our states to demand action to save our republic.

The beauty in the Article 5 process is that it has such a high barrier to fruition. As such the Article 5 Process requires an issue that is wholly nonpartisan and easily understood by over 90% of the population. Take the Bill of Rights for example, this was something every average citizen could support, both Virginia and New York both called for an Article 5 convention on that limited topic. This call for the Article 5 Convention was the impetus for a young Congress to jump in front of this movement and add the Bill of Rights to our US Constitution.

People often concern themselves with the unknowns of an Article 5 Convention for proposing amendments. However, more than 200 conventions for amending state constitutions have been held with few problems (in PA the most recent one was in 1967). We expect that admirable tradition to continue with an Article 5 convention because we rely on a representative democracy to keep our republic equally represented. The responsibility falls on the backs of our representatives to ensure that the limited convention stays to one topic and that the proposed Amendment is tied to that limited convention topic.

Our proud Commonwealth has a rich history of successfully using the Article V convention call. On February 13th 1901, Pennsylvania joined the coalition of states passing a convention call to directly elect U.S. Senators. While the federal Senate of the time was seen as terribly corrupt and unwilling to change the system from which they benefited, once the 27 states applied for a convention on this topic, the Federal Senate capitulated and proposed the amendment themselves.

In 1979, Pennsylvania responded to a perceived national need to amend the US Constitution to prevent deficit spending by the federal government. Pennsylvania passed a convention call joining 31 states in calling for a Balanced Budget Amendment. According to the Congressional Research Service, this enormous statement by the states was ultimately what pushed Congress to pass the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act in 1985, which ultimately led to a balanced federal budget in the 1990s. Historically, when you need change from an unresponsive Congress, this is how you do it.

Pennsylvania has five Article V convention calls on the books right now:
Direct election of Senators (1901)

Limiting mandates on federal funding (1943)
Repeal of 16th (income tax) (1943)
Right to life (1978)
Balanced budget (1979)

All of these Resolutions are an exercise in our state's right to identify an urgent national need in their time. SR-254 would simply add a 6th convention application to the pile for campaign finance reform, just as there was in 1901. There is a need in our state and country today that our federal congress does not seem willing to address on their own. We're here today because we trust you to stand up to them on behalf of us, your citizens. Please vote yes on SR-254 whether in this session or the next.